

**“Sounds of Yoga” Seminar with Yogacharini Dr. Sangeeta
Gitananda Yoga Society Germany e.V. / Berlin
30-31 July, 2011**

The first contact of our society with Yogacharini Dr. Sangeeta was in the Gurukula Ananda Ashram January 2011 as we studied with other students Course 2010 / 11 under masterfully guiding Amma and Dr. Ananda for two weeks.

We came again together in Savona at Gitananda Ashram May 2011.

It was a great pleasure to ask Yogacharini Dr. Sangeeta knowing her skills for a Seminar “The Sounds of Yoga” in Berlin in July 2011.

Thank you for the good seminar and for your Paramparai yoga company!

*Board of Gitananda Yoga Society
Yogacharini Latha*

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THE BERLIN YOGA FAMILY

Yogacharini Prema’s friendly face and sincere greeting gestures welcomed me at the Berlin’s Schonefeld Airport on a warm July afternoon. ““You are bringing the sun from Italy!” she cheered, “after many days of rain.” Another dream come true: the invitation to travel to share the wonderful teachings of this *pramparai*. I am honoured and grateful for the blessings that Ammaji and Dr. Ananda gave me for this journey and seminar. Without their permission and love this could not have happened.

The week I lived in Berlin I received much love, respect, gifts and care. There was much sadhana, laughter, food, singing, sightseeing and love that Yogacharini Latha, her husband Simo, Yogacharini Prema, Kirsten and the other great beings of the Gitananda Yoga Society in Berlin and I shared. For this and more I am grateful and joyful.

A whole book could be written on each person, place, and moment. Let it suffice to say that while in Berlin I was invited to visit two amazing museums with Greco-Roman, Egyptian, Assyrian and more collections by Prema, had a boat cruise on the river Spree with Latha and Kirsten, was given a magic card, by Kirsten, to have as many croissants and cappuccinos I pleased at the awesome Cafè Behring, sang “O Sole Mio” and “Starry Night” (among others) with Simo, visited the World Gardens Park with Latha and Simo (we travelled to Italy, China, Japan, Bali, and more in only seven hours! What a Siddhi!), and had the honour to teach a two days intensive seminar at the Society with eleven wonderful beings who never, in the ten hours we sat together, lost their concentration or attention. Thank you all! Danke.

THE TEACHINGS

It is my experience that all yogic practices touch on each other, nourish each other, and strengthen each other. Sound is an integral part of *sadhana*. All that exists vibrates. All that vibrates makes a sound. The fact that our ears, a limited sense organ, can hear it or not does not limit the existence of an all-encompassing field of sound. “Yoga is a way of life”, said and wrote Swami Gitananda. Life is sound, we can add. Therefore, *Yoga is Sound*. We can now move to another step, in which we take responsibility for the sounds we hear, make, stimulate, to the point where we can happily state that *Sound is Yoga!* This was the main idea of the

seminar. Like sound, it rippled in many waves, stimulating ideas, choices, and intentions. Because sound is vibration and reality, beyond what we perceive, is of a vibratory nature, sound can shape reality. Wisdom, seeping through various cultural forms, whispers in our ears that sacred sound (*mantra, prayers, sutra, chants*) is the magical architecture that holds the world together through names (*nama*) in form (*rupa*).



Both days, we followed the same pattern:

1. *Opening aarathi and prayers in the tradition of Ananda Ashram*
2. *Hatha Yoga Practices*
3. *Study of the Sanskrit Alphabet and its application to chanting*
4. *Study of the Basic Concepts of Carnatic Music*
5. *Bhajans*

Some ideas/practices of the seminar:

HATHA YOGA PRACTICES

We started with the most essential concept: the body is our sacred instrument. Swami Gitananda has codified various *hatha yoga* practices that involve the use of sound, but the ones I chose are the *Loma-Viloma* for the first day, and the *Hathenas* for the second. Both practices are balancing, toning, purifying and both stimulate the large muscle of the diaphragm, necessary not only for proper breathing and digestion, but also for chanting and singing. The understanding and the control of how the diaphragm works, and how to keep it healthy, is a great step in the process of human evolution.

We started and ended the *hatha yoga* sessions with the *Mukha Bastrika*. After some *jathis*, we moved onto the practices.

First Day:

- *Loma-Viloma*: With an 8:4 *Savitri Pranayama*. We used the time and the space we had to work with the full four groups, keeping the counts slow and steady. We noticed how the body temperature slowly rose and perceived the energy being stored in the *kanda*, at the base of the spine.

Second Day:

- *Hathenas*: We practiced the whole series. All the *asana* involved in this series require an opening of the chest and of the back, in order to stimulate the thoracic cavity. The head is also tilted backwards to stimulate the respiratory centre located in the *medulla oblongata* of our brain. Here, I had a good realization (even though I am quite sure that both Ammaji and Dr. Ananda have told us students this many times. I was just not ready to hear it). Our animal nature does not like to back bend or to arch the torso backwards. This is quite a vulnerable attitude for an animal and, as a matter of fact, few animals bend backwards, and they never do when in danger. In the *Hathenas* we are constantly arching backwards. Not only. The pressure point of the arch becomes higher and higher towards the brain and the relative upper part of the lungs. Such a genius codification! Breath is life! Life is acceptance of death! The *Hathenas*, stimulating our breathing system, force us to face the *abhinivesha klesha*, our fear of death, the survival instinct.

STUDY OF THE SANSKRIT LANGUAGE

A graduate of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures of the University of Siena and a Professor of Italian Language in the USA, I have taught languages to many students. Yet, the pleasure of sharing the beauty and depth of Sanskrit language is, to date, the most complete. These teachings are also an honour and a gift for which I am grateful to the *acharyas* that taught it to me, Smt. Devasena Bhavanani, and especially, Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani, who never sat to teach it to me but whose work on the *Yoga Sutra* of Maharishi Patanjali taught me more than years of schoolwork.

In a dynamic state of quietude, a point of immense power condensed. When it bursts with a light of a million crores of suns, its sound was the *Pranava AUM*. This perfect beam of light and sound started to refract and break into grosser and grosser elements, still extremely high: the sounds of the Sanskrit alphabet. They also became grosser and grosser, settling into the dynamic dance of names and forms that gave life to *maya*.

As Dr. Ananda often repeats, emanation and creation travel from the most *sattvic* to the grossest. However, when we embark on our journey back “OM”, we must start from the grossest elements we have: the sonic utterance of letters, words, and sentences. The out-loud repetition of the alphabet is a *sadhana* in itself because no matter how slow this sound vibration is, it does contain the



potential and the imprint of the AUM. The *japa* (repetition) of the letters, and their sacred combination into the words of the *mantra* and of *sutra*, is an excellent tool for the process of re-absorption into Oneness.

First Day:

- Proper pronunciation of the vowels and of the consonants. Realization, at the experiential level, that on the acoustic and vocal level, both the vowel and the consonant systems stimulate the vocal apparatus to play with *all* the chest, throat, mouth, nasal, and head resonances: play with guttural, palatal, cerebral, dental, labial and relaxed-tongue sounds.
- Application of the study of the alphabet to the proper pronunciation of the *Mantra Sung On Sundays at Kambaliswami Madam*

Second Day:

- Review of pronunciation.
- Practical application of the study to the first verse of the *Guru Stotra*. Chanting of the full *Stotra*.
- Practical application of the study to some of the *sutra* of the *Yoga Sutra* of Maharishi Patanjali (*sutra I:1, I:2 and II:29, II:30*), learning to chant with the proper long and short accents in the Vedic notation.

THE STUDY OF CARNATIC MUSIC

Some may not see the connection between Carnatic music, the classical music of Southern India and *yoga*. Yet, as we are taught at ICYER, the study of Carnatic music is a *sadhana* in its own rights. Let's look at, first of all, how this form of music requires an attempt to master some of the eight steps of *ashtanga yoga*. First of all, *asana*. The singer and the musicians must learn to sit up for long periods of time, directly on the floor. Not only that: they need to be comfortable with it or else the right posture to sing (a balance of tension and relaxation) will be lost and the singing will suffer from it. A straight spine, shoulders up and relaxed, chin up.... Haven't we heard this description before? Then, *pranayama*, of course. The right understanding of how breathing works, and the control on the energy (*prana*) contained in air, makes the difference between a good and a not so good performance. *Pratyahara*: Carnatic artists stay fairly still. The *asana* is dynamic but the singers and musicians learn not to waste any energy in moving about or "roaming" on stage. Movement can come as a result of emotional expressivity, and of "entrainment", the effect of moving with the beat, especially at the end of melodic phrase or the *tala*. Yet, artists remain in their positions, not unlike Western classical musicians. Classical music, all over the world, is a form of *pratyahara*, sense control. In Carnatic music, this is even more highlighted by the *asana* of the musicians who often lock their legs in a crossed-legs position and do not gesticulate or move as much. Also, even when a musician is quiet or a singer does not sing, s/he is required to keep the proper *asana* and avoid distractions. *Dharana*: concentration. When you are dealing with keeping your instrument in tune (*sruti*), keeping track of the rhythmic pattern (*tala*), making sure you are choosing the right notes (*swara*) for that particular mode (*raga*), you are choosing the right words, and, you are also interpreting the song with the proper emotions (*bhava*), yes, you are concentrating! As for the *yama* and *niyama*, not all Carnatic musicians are walking the yoga path. However, when a *yogi* sings or plays this music, then miracles can occur. This may also lead to *dhyana*. Please do make an effort to sit and hear Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani sing live. Then you will know what I mean.

First Day:

- Theoretical and Practical Concepts of Carnatic Music: *Sruti, Tala, Raga*.
- Modal versus Harmonic Musical Systems
- Practice of the first four exercises of the basic music text *Ganamrutha Bodhini* in the three speeds.

Second Day:

- Practice of the first eight exercises of *Ganamrutha Bodhini* in the three speeds.

BHAJANS

Mighty *bhajans*! We sang together a few each day among which: *Ganesha Sharanam, Bolo Bolo, Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya*. Yogacharini Latha led *Pillaiar* and Yogacharini Prema *Hey Jagabandan*.

CONCLUSIONS

Great love and gratitude to Yogacharini Latha, a senior *acharya* to me, who shared the strength and joy of humility and trust in inviting me to the heart of the Gitananda Yoga Society in Berlin for this seminar. The skills of ten students who participated in the seminar bear witness to the commitment to the teachings and the *paramaparai*.

It is important to realize that the more we teach, the more we learn and the more we learn the best we can teach. For this truth I wish to thank the *paramparay* and our beloved Ammaji, Smt Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, great woman, daughter, wife, mother, grandmother and *guru*; and our beloved Yogacharya Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani. They have always taught us with the hope that, one day, we may fly to teach.

JAYA GURU!

Yogacharini Sangeeta

Siena ~ August 5, 2011

